

Dialectics on Its Feet, or the Form of the Consciousness of the Working Class as Historical Subject

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1 Placing Dialectics Right Side Up

In his afterword to *Capital*, Marx defines his method as a dialectical one. In so doing, he explicitly recognises Hegel as ‘the first to present its [dialectics]’ general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner’.¹ However, he also points out:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite . . . With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.²

What does it mean to place dialectics right side up, starting from Hegel’s inversion?

The question cannot be avoided, unless someone were to believe that Marx was incoherent and actually based his developments on the logic of Hegel – of which the latter considered his method to be its content³ – although he stated the necessity of inverting this method.

Could it be about replacing ‘idea’ where Hegel uses the term with ‘matter’ in order to reconstruct a dialectical logic?⁴ Is it about providing ‘materialist content’ for Hegel’s logic?⁵ Is it about placing ‘capital’ where Hegel places ‘idea’?⁶ These changes imply changing the content upon which logic operates. But Marx refers to placing the method itself right side up. Therefore, the point is the very form of the process of knowledge.

1 Marx 1965 [1867], p. 20.

2 Marx 1965 [1867], pp. 19–20.

3 Hegel 1999 [1812–16], p. 53.

4 Althusser 1972, p. 172.

5 Levine 2006, p. 49.

6 Meaney 2002, p. 8; Arthur 1993, pp. 86–7.

Could it be about Marx applying the 'Logic of Essence' where Hegel applies the 'Logic of Being'?⁷ In this case, the inversion would only have a partial character, as if it could be said that Hegel's logic uses arms where it should use legs. But the problem pointed out by Marx is that Hegel's method is inverted from head to toe.

Could the change in form mean proceeding from a general logical structure to one particularly appropriate to its object? In an early stage of the development of his thought, Marx asserted:

However, this comprehension [*Begreifen*] does not, as Hegel thinks, consist in everywhere recognizing the determinations of the logical concept [*des logischen Begriffs*], but rather in grasping the proper logic of the proper object.⁸

Do we thus reach the answer by resorting to a logic that starts from the simplest category which represents the proper object and makes this category develop itself through its own movement, so as to engender a more complex category, and so on, until an integral system of categories which belong to the proper object is completed? For example, is it about the development of the concept of the commodity engendering the concept of money, and the development of the latter engendering the concept of capital, and so on?⁹ Marx himself rejects the idealist inversion inherent in such a procedure:

Apply this method to the categories of political economy and you have the logic and metaphysics of political economy . . . which makes them look as if they had newly blossomed forth in an intellect of pure reason; so much do these categories seem to engender one another, to be linked up and intertwined with one another by the very working of the dialectic movement.¹⁰

Moreover, Marx criticises himself with regard to the risk of letting the form of presentation generate the appearance that his research has fallen into this sort of idealist inversion:

The product becomes a commodity; the commodity becomes exchange value; the exchange value of the commodity is its immanent

7 Smith 1990, pp. 51–3.

8 Marx 1970b [1859], p. 92.

9 Fineschi 2006, pp. 128–9.

10 Marx 1976b [1847], p. 165.

money-property; this, its money-property, separates itself from it in the form of money . . . It will be necessary later . . . to correct the idealist manner of the presentation, which makes it seem as if it were merely a matter of conceptual determinations and of the dialectic of these concepts.¹¹

It happens that logic is a constructive necessity produced by thought, whose movement as such is alien to the movement of the necessity that determines the object. Marx develops, apropos of Proudhon, the unavoidable contradiction implied by any attempt to follow in thought, at the same time, the necessity taken from reality and a logical-constructive necessity:

When M. Proudhon spoke of the *series in the understanding*, of the *logical sequence of categories*, he declared positively that he did not want to give *history according to the order in time* . . . Thus for him everything happened in the *pure ether of reason*. Everything was to be derived from this ether by means of dialectics. Now that he has to put this dialectics into practice, his reason is in default . . . [N]ow we have M. Proudhon reduced to saying that the order in which he gives the economic categories is no longer the order in which they engender one another. Economic evolutions are no longer the evolutions of reason itself. What then does M. Proudhon give us? Real history . . . ? No! History as it takes place in the idea itself? Still less! . . . What history does he give us then? The history of his own contradictions.¹²

The problem with logic, whatever its alleged degree of generality or singularity, resides in its exteriority with respect to the real necessity. Every logical representation rules its path based on the substitution of the real necessity by a constructive necessity that appears as bearing the power to put thought into motion:

Logic – mind's *coin of the realm*, the speculative or *mental value* of man and nature – its essence which has grown totally indifferent to all real determinateness and hence unreal – is *alienated thinking*, and therefore thinking which abstracts from nature and from real man: *abstract thinking*.¹³

11 Marx 1973 [1857–8], pp. 147, 151.

12 Marx 1976b [1847], p. 169.

13 Marx 1975e [1844], p. 330.

Once again, what is the point? Let us address the question by reproducing the paths followed by Hegel and Marx as they present the unfolding of their methods.

2 Hegel's Idealistic Construction of 'Pure Knowledge' Which Immediately is 'Fulfilled Being'

Hegel recognises that scientific knowledge, as the 'science of manifested spirit', starts from 'empirical, *sensuous* consciousness', an '*immediate* knowledge', therefore, a knowledge which emerges from practice.¹⁴

But Hegel idealistically inverts the fact that knowledge is always knowledge of one's subjectivity with respect to the object upon which one is going to act. Instead of facing the question of knowledge as the discovery, by the subject, of the necessity of its action regarding the potentiality of the object, he inverts the question into that of the re-establishment of the identity between the subjective process of knowing and the objective determination of the potentiality, where the former engenders the latter. He thus represents immediate knowledge as pertaining to a subjectivity which confronts itself from its own exteriority, since it is not capable of recognising the object as its own self-realisation. It deals with a subjectivity whose limitation in determining the object resides in that which is not developed even in its self-consciousness as the determinant of the object, in the fact that it does not recognise itself as a determinant.

Consequently, for Hegel, the overcoming of immediate cognition does not consist in the deepening of knowledge of the determinations of the subject and of those of the object, but rather the point is to abstract the movement of knowledge itself, since this movement itself has engendered subjectivity as well as its realisation as objectivity. Therefore, immediate knowledge is not followed by the discovery of the content which determines the necessity of the subject and of the object, by penetrating into this content. For Hegel, the point is simply to penetrate the 'significance . . . of immediate knowledge' itself.¹⁵

Thus, the very forms of the subject's consciousness, already emptied of their historical determinations by having been abstracted from the object of their action,¹⁶ become inverted as if they were the pure object of knowledge which in its movement engenders the consciousness:

¹⁴ Hegel 1999 [1812–16], p. 69.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Consequently, free consciousness that bears the alienation in the commodity – this being the historically specific determination of Hegel's own consciousness – is raised to an abstractly free consciousness.

Spirit . . . has shown itself to us to be . . . *this movement* of the Self which empties itself of itself and links itself into its substance, and also, as Subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, making the substance into an object and a content at the same time as it cancels this difference between objectivity and content. That first reflection out of immediacy is the Subject's differentiation of itself from its substance, or the Notion's separation of itself from itself, the withdrawal into itself and the becoming the pure 'I'.¹⁷

The phenomenology of spirit culminates in 'pure knowledge', 'the *Notion* of science', which is the 'absolute truth of *consciousness*'.¹⁸ Upon reaching this point, in which the forms of consciousness have been elevated to the condition of being the pure object of themselves, Hegel considers that 'in absolute knowing . . . the separation of the *object* from the *certainty of itself* is completely eliminated; truth is now equated with certainty and this certainty with truth'.¹⁹

Since for Hegel consciousness has thus overcome 'the difference between knowledge and truth',²⁰ 'pure science . . . contains *thought in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought*'.²¹ And since 'pure knowing as concentrated into this unity [certainty which has become truth] has sublated all reference to an other and to mediation . . . this simple immediacy, therefore, in its true expression is *pure being*'.²²

Thus Hegel arrives at the point of departure of the *Logic*, which is 'pure science, that is, pure knowledge in the entire range of its development'.²³ Once this development has been unfolded:

Thus then logic, too, in the absolute Idea . . . is the Idea that has reached . . . a likeness corresponding to itself. The method is the pure Notion that relates itself only to itself; it is therefore the *simple self-relation* that is *being*. But now it is also *fulfilled being*, the *Notion that comprehends itself*, being as the *concrete* and also absolutely *intensive totality*.²⁴

17 Hegel 1977 [1807], p. 490.

18 Hegel 1999 [1812–16], p. 68.

19 Hegel 1999 [1812–16], p. 49.

20 Hegel 1977 [1807], p. 491.

21 Hegel 1999 [1812–16], p. 49.

22 Hegel 1999 [1812–16], p. 69.

23 Ibid.

24 Hegel 1999 [1812–16], p. 842.

The relationship that the subject of the action establishes with his/her object by ideally appropriating his/her own potentiality with respect to the object's potentiality in order to transform it, namely, the capacity of the human subject to organise his/her conscious action, appears here completely inverted. Hegel represents it as if it were a particular concrete form of an impersonal rationality, of a self-consciousness, which does not arise from human subjectivity, but, conversely, determines it. Here, freedom is not a historically determined social relation whose development is borne in the development of human subjectivity as it objectively advances in knowing its own transforming powers, and therefore transcending itself. Quite the opposite: Hegel idealistically inverts freedom, creating the appearance that it constitutes the attribute of a self-consciousness that only relates to itself in the complete impossibility of transcending its own identity:

The Idea, namely, in positing itself as the absolute *unity* of the pure Notion and its reality and thus contracting itself into the immediacy of *being*, is the *totality* in this form – *nature*. But this determination has not *issued from a process of becoming*, nor is it a *transition*, as when above, the subjective Notion in its totality *becomes objectivity*, and the *subjective end becomes life*. On the contrary, the pure Idea in which the determinateness or reality of the Notion is itself raised into Notion, is an absolute *liberation* for which there is no longer any immediate determination that is not equally *posited* and itself Notion; in this freedom, therefore, no transition takes place.²⁵

What is the concrete reality of this freedom? It is but each and all of the concrete forms of the social relation in the capitalist mode of production – private property, value, contracts, right, fraud, morality, ethics, family, justice, guilt, police, state, and so on – conceived as forms inherent by nature in human subjectivity by grace of the self-conscious Idea.²⁶ Thus:

The state is the actuality of the ethical Idea . . . the actuality of concrete freedom . . . The principle of modern states has prodigious strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the extreme of self-subsistent personal particularity, and yet

²⁵ Hegel 1999 [1812–16], p. 843.

²⁶ Hegel 2008 [1820].

at the same time brings it back to the substantive unity and so maintains this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself.²⁷

The complete realisation of Hegel's Idea is but the cultivation of the apparently limitless reproduction of the capitalist mode of production with all of its contradictions overcome.

3 Marx's Discovery of Dialectics as the Necessary Form of Revolutionary Consciousness

3.1 *The Analysis*

Marx synthesises his critique of Hegel's method as follows:

Impersonal reason, having outside itself neither a base on which it can pose itself, nor an object to which it can oppose itself, nor a subject with which it can compose itself, is forced to turn head over heels, in posing itself, opposing itself and composing itself . . . If we abstract thus from every subject all the alleged accidents, animate or inanimate, men or things, we are right in saying that in the final abstraction, the only substance left is the logical categories . . . [O]ne has only to make an abstraction of every characteristic distinctive of different movements to attain movement in its abstract condition – purely formal movement, the purely logical formula of movement. If one finds in logical categories the substance of all things, one imagines one has found in the logical formula of movement the *absolute method*, which not only explains all things, but also implies the movement of things . . . All things being reduced to a logical category, and every movement, every act of production, to method, it follows naturally that every aggregate of products and production, of objects and of movement, can be reduced to a form of applied metaphysics . . . So what is this absolute method? . . . The purely logical form of movement or the movement of pure reason . . . Up to now we have exposed only the dialectics of Hegel.²⁸

Next, he observes, 'Hegel has no problems to formulate. He has only dialectics . . . [Proudhon] has the advantage over Hegel of setting problems.'²⁹ By then, Marx

27 Hegel 2008 [1820], pp. 228, 235.

28 Marx 1976b [1847], pp. 162–5.

29 Marx 1976b [1847], p. 168.

had already set his own problem: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it'.³⁰

This problem places us immediately in the field of action. And the first step in the very realisation of action corresponds to its organisation. How could action be organised through a consciousness that goes beyond the interpretation of reality, other than by questioning oneself about the objective potentiality of one's action and, therefore, about this action's necessity? That is, the point is now to answer oneself about the potentiality of one's action *vis-à-vis* the potentiality of its object, namely, about the determination of one's subjectivity as the necessary concrete form of realising the potentiality of the object upon which action is to be taken.

Marx faces for the first time the problem he has posited by reproducing Hegel's course and, consequently, with the perspective that the movement of social life should be explained starting from the movement of the state. Therefore, the overcoming of the barriers to the reproduction of social life should arise from the realisation of the state's ought-to-be. However, just as Marx addresses the practice of such reproduction, he finds that there is a superior social power that imposes upon this assumed ought-to-be, namely, private interest:

[T]he Assembly degrades the executive power, the administrative authorities, the life of the accused, the idea of the state, crime itself, and punishment as well, to *material means of private interest* . . . [which means to] solve each material problem *in a non-political way*, i.e., without any connection with the whole of the reason and morality of the state.³¹

If the state, and even its idea, are but material means of private interest, is political freedom not then a form of this same private interest? How could the state be the subject which is the bearer of human freedom if the political freedom which constitutes it has private interest as its content? Finally, how is it possible to advance, acting politically in a rational manner, without beginning to respond with regard to the necessity of private interest?

At the point where Hegel's abstraction found an answer by resorting to the state as 'the actuality of the ethical Idea', thus bringing down all antagonism to an insufficient development of that Idea in its historical course, Marx's analysis finds a question, namely, the question about the necessity of the subordination of the state, of politics, to private interest. Therefore, Marx seeks to find

³⁰ Marx 1976a [1845], p. 5.

³¹ Marx 1975a [1842], pp. 259, 262.

the necessity of private interest where it manifests itself in an immediate manner, where the lack of all generic unity represented by the state seems to prevail, that is, in 'civil society', whose quality is that 'the only bond between men is natural necessity'.³² The question is now about the organisation of the process in which human beings satisfy their natural needs, whose point of departure is the organisation of the process of social production.³³

Fifteen years after setting his problem, Marx synthesised the path followed by his analysis:

My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel . . . embraces within the term 'civil society'; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy.³⁴

Now, the analysis faces the categories of political economy. But as soon as these categories are questioned concerning their necessity, they show that:

We have proceeded from the premises of political economy . . . [I]n its own words, we have shown that the worker sinks to the level of a commodity . . . Labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity* . . . This fact expresses merely that the object which labour produces – labour's product – confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer . . . within the *producing activity*, itself.³⁵

Since political economy is a system of categories, its critique in search of its necessity as a concrete form of the consciousness that organises this alienated producing activity, therefore, as a form of alienated consciousness itself, points towards its simplest category: 'The first category in which bourgeois wealth presents itself is that of the *commodity*.'³⁶

But Marx's analysis could not stop at a category, namely, at a form in which this alienated consciousness conceives, and therefore interprets, its own determinations. His analysis needed to face the commodity itself. He recognises in

32 Marx 1967b [1844], pp. 225, 236–7.

33 Marx and Engels 1998 [1845], pp. 47, 48–9, 98.

34 Marx 1987b [1859], p. 262.

35 Marx 1975e [1844], pp. 270–80.

36 Marx 1973 [1857–8], p. 881.

the commodity the simplest real concrete in which the historically specific character of the alienated organisation of social production is manifested. With this, he recognises the commodity as the concrete from which the reproduction in thought of the determinations of the subjectivity able to supersede the capitalist mode of production must necessarily begin:

In the first place, I do not start out from 'concepts', hence I do not start from the 'concept of value' . . . What I start out from is the simplest social form in which the labour-product is presented in contemporary society, and this is 'the commodity'.³⁷

From the *Grundrisse* to *A Contribution* and *Capital* Marx makes here a definitive step forward in putting dialectics on its feet: in the same way that in biology it is clear that the cell from which one departs is a real concrete and not a concept or a category, the commodity, namely, 'the economic cell-form [in bourgeois society]';³⁸ is equally so.

3.2 *The Dialectical Reproduction of the Concrete*

Marx presents the point of departure of the dialectical development by stating, 'The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities", its unit being a single commodity.'³⁹

On confronting the commodity as a real concrete and not as a category or a concept, the first knowledge of it could enter an exposition only as a simple immediate knowledge, that is, as the simple observation of a fact for whose necessity the very point of departure cannot account. The supersession of Hegel's inversion is already manifested here in a twofold manner. Against Hegel's abstract 'pure knowledge', we have here the modest determined concrete being of the commodity and the modest immediate knowledge which has not gone beyond the appearance presented by social wealth in capitalist society. Moreover, the same supersession is expressed in the unity itself between knowledge and being: here, the existence of the commodity obliges thought to get into motion from its exterior, far from that 'pure knowledge' from whose immediateness 'pure being' emerged. At the same time, this point of departure is empty of any concept able to be placed in motion, either by

37 Marx 2002 [1879/1881], p. 241.

38 Marx 1965 [1867], p. 8.

39 Marx 1965 [1867], p. 35.

imposing upon it a given logical structure, or by expecting that it can get into motion by itself as a consequence of its proper logic.

To overcome its immediateness, knowledge needs to confront analytically the commodity in its reality, in search of the necessity that gives it its character as that simplest social form. The point is to confront the commodity in its real existence, in order to analyse it with the purpose of discovering why it presents the peculiar social property of being a use-value that bears the unnatural power of being an exchange-value. Marx performs this analysis, thus discovering that this attribute of the commodity, its value, emerges from its being a materialisation of a labour which appears to lack any specific quality. He raises the question about the necessity of this labour as the determinant of value, a question which can only be answered by analysing this same labour. He thus discovers that the labour represented as the value of commodities embodies a material quality, that of being a productive physiological expenditure of the human body, and a social quality, that of being that physiological expenditure applied to the production of use-values for other individuals, of social use-values, which has been governed in its application by a private consciousness and independently of those individuals.

Thus, the analysis discovers socially necessary abstract labour, performed in a private and independent manner, to be the human activity that provides the commodity with its exchangeability, with its value. Nevertheless, it cannot answer the question of why this materialised labour represents itself in such a way. The only place where thought can objectively examine the manifestation of this necessity is where this necessity realises itself. Therefore, unless one attempts to force a logical movement upon the object, the only path opened to dialectical knowledge is to reproduce by means of thought the movement through which the commodity expresses its value in reality, that is, to follow ideally the commodity in the practical expression of its value in the process of exchange. How is this possible? Firstly, to say that the commodity has an attribute – namely, its capacity to be exchanged – is the same as saying that it has a potentiality to be realised. Therefore, its real determination is its affirmation as this realised potentiality, or in other words, its negation as that same to-be-realised potentiality. Its determination is the affirmation of its attribute through its own negation. Secondly, thought is the subject's capacity virtually to appropriate his/her own potentiality with respect to the potentiality of its object. Thought thus confronts the real commodity and realises its own determination; that is, it affirms itself as a subjectivity that knows, negating itself as a subjectivity that bears knowledge as a potentiality yet to be realised.

Now, it becomes apparent that although the value of a commodity is a quantity of socially necessary abstract labour, it necessarily takes the form of a cer-

tain quantity of another privately produced use-value. That is, in the capitalist mode of production, social labour only manifests itself in the form of a thing that relates mutually independent producers with each other. At the moment they act as individual organs of social labour, that is, at the moment they organise their social labour, commodity-producers do not appear to be related between themselves, beyond each of them being the bearer of an individual portion of society's total labour-power. However, they do not bear this portion as the capacity to perform a certain concrete labour already determined by the same organisation of social labour, but in so far as it concerns their capacity to perform labour in general, to expend productively their body in general. Then, each one decides, according to his/her own consciousness and will, namely, in a private and independent manner, in which concrete useful form he/she expends his/her labour-power. Each one thus affirms him/herself as a subject free from all personal dependency with respect to those for whom he/she works.

Nevertheless, the recognition of his/her labour as socially useful is not an attribute that belongs to him/her, but a private attribute of everybody else's will. The capacity to recognise the social character of the labour performed by each one is an attribute inherent to the others, and only once the same labour has been materialised in its product. Therefore, this mutual recognition is established through the equalisation of those products in exchange as materialisations of that sole social relation that existed between their producers at the moment in which each of them had to give, in a private and independent manner, a concrete form to his/her capacity to perform labour in general. Provided this generic labour-power has been appropriately applied, that is to say, provided abstract labour has been materialised in a socially useful concrete form, the materiality of that same labour is represented as the social attribute borne by its product to relate, in exchange, with another which bears the same materialisation. That is, the materiality of socially necessary abstract labour is represented as the value of its product, and this product presents its specific social determination as a commodity. This is the indirect form in which the material unity of social production organised in a private and independent manner imposes itself. The value-form taken by commodities is the general social relation that the private independent producers establish between themselves in an indirect manner.

Given that he/she performs his/her labour in a private and independent manner, the commodity-producer fully controls its individual character, and therefore affirms himself/herself as an individual free from any relationship of personal dependence. However, at the same time, he/she lacks any control over his/her labour's social character. The powers of his/her own individual labour with respect to the unity of the process of social metabolism completely

escape his/her control. Consequently, he/she has to submit his/her consciousness and will (which is inherent in a free individual) to the social powers borne by the product of his/her labour. Value, and therefore his/her capacity to take part in the organisation of social labour, and then in social consumption, is not his/her personal attribute. It is an attribute alien to his/her person; it belongs to his/her commodity. The material product of the labour that the consciousness and will of his/hers that is inherent in a free individual have governed confronts him/her as the bearer of a social power that is alien to him/her and to which his/her consciousness and will are submitted. Therefore, the free consciousness and will of commodity-producers are the form in which the alienation of their consciousness and will as attributes of commodities is realised. Their free consciousness is the form taken by their alienated consciousness. Thus, they behave towards the commodity in a fetishistic way.

Starting from the movement of the commodity, we discover alienated consciousness. However, we have not made this discovery by logically developing the category 'commodity', but by reproducing through thought the real movement of commodities. Now, the fact that this alienated consciousness is the one which the commodity-producer employs to govern his/her participation in his/her production confronts us with the following evidence: just as our point of departure was that 'immense accumulation of commodities', alienated consciousness was already present in its realisation at the point of departure itself. Moreover, consciousness is the form in which human subjects bear their capacity to govern their individual labour as organs of social labour. Therefore, regarding commodity-producers, we see that their capacity to govern their individual labour is an attribute that fully concerns their consciousness and will. Nevertheless, at the same time, they lack any control over the social character of their labour. This control is an attribute objectified in the commodity. Therefore, when commodity-producers look at the movement of their own product, what confronts them is the movement of their alienated capacity to govern their social labour. We can then say that, in both *A Contribution* and *Capital*, the point of departure is the specific historical form presented to the subjects of action by their own consciousness in the capitalist mode of production. However, it would have been impossible to begin abstractly from the consciousness itself of commodity-producers, in order to discover free consciousness as the form of alienated consciousness. It is impossible to discover objectively the fetishism of commodities without discovering, first, the specific form in which social labour is organised, which is the production of commodities. Here, the social relation takes form in the consciousness and will of its subjects, and not vice versa.

In addition, let us notice that what confronts us here is not the abstract consciousness of an abstract commodity-producer. Actually, it is the very consciousness which has achieved this discovery, namely, *it is our own consciousness*. Its power to produce the said discovery, and therefore the development of its freedom, is but an expression of the development of its alienation.

Let us continue following the movement of the commodity. The same development of the form of value makes it evident that, even though the general social relation appears to arise *a posteriori* from the material process of production, the organisation of this process requires that one commodity in particular becomes placed apart by the movement of the rest, to act as the socially recognised substantive expression of social labour performed in a private and independent manner. The generalised production of commodities, which makes social wealth appear as an immense accumulation of commodities, implies the developed existence of money. Therefore, the point is not that the commodity has become money, or that the category 'commodity' has engendered the category 'money', by following a logical necessity. The point is that the movement of commodities, namely, the movement of the simplest specific concrete, has placed us in front of the real necessity that determines the existence of money as that objectified expression.

The realisation of commodities as values takes us from production to circulation. When we confronted production, we discovered commodity-producers to be individuals free from any personal dependence who socially relate themselves in an indirect way through commodity-exchange, which operates behind their backs, thus determining their consciousness and will as alienated. Now, in circulation, we see that that indirect relation takes the concrete form of a direct relation, a conscious and voluntary one, as personifications of commodities. Thus we discover that the indirect relation between persons, that is, the economic relation, realises its necessity under the form of a direct relation between personifications, that is, as a juridical relation.

Once again, the accumulation of commodities from which we departed was already mediated in its existence by the juridical relations between commodity-owners, but we were unable to account for these relations at that point. Therefore, those who attempt to start by erasing the specificity of commodities as the social representation of the materiality of socially useful abstract labour performed privately are unable to go beyond the representation of the relationship that exists between economic relations and juridical relations as an external one. Since juridical relations appear to emerge from the will of mutually independent individuals, these conceptions fall victim to the appearance that human beings are abstractly free subjects by nature. From this follows the appearance that alienation is externally imposed upon this nature, thus

hindering the recognition of alienation as the content of freedom, and thus the recognition of freedom as a historical social relation.

When we continue by following with our thought the real movement of commodities in circulation, we come to face the concrete form in which the unity between social production and consumption is established. At the stage where we had completed the first development of the form of value, we knew that the only possibility for this unity was the exchange of commodities in the exact proportion in which they were materialisations of the same quantity of socially necessary abstract labour. Now we discover that this determination affirms itself by taking a concrete form that appears as its own negation: those commodities whose production exceeds or falls short, *vis-à-vis* the amount of the solvent social necessity for them at their value, retain their capacity to enter the exchange-relation. But they do so by representing a greater or lesser amount of social labour than the socially necessary one which they actually embody. That is, the realisation of the values of commodities takes concrete shape, in competition, through the selling of commodities above or beneath their values.

Again, the point here is not that the category 'commodity' has logically engendered the category 'competition'. Nor is it the case that we have started by abstracting the commodity from the contingencies of competition, by constructively introducing the simplifying assumption of the immediate realisation of value, and that we are now lifting this assumption. However, the point is also not that the commodity we came to know at first carried in itself, as a latent potentiality, the necessity of engendering the movement of competition. On the contrary, as the elementary form of the initial accumulation of commodities, it was the full expression of the realisation of all the concrete determinations of competition. But it was impossible at that stage for us to apprehend it as such with our thought. Only by beginning with the commodity as the simplest specific concrete could we come completely to appropriate its determination as a full concrete.

As soon as the movement of commodities in circulation demands that we account for its concrete form as competition, we advance another step in recognising the determinations of the consciousness and will of personifications. All the direct relations that they establish in the organisation of social life necessarily have an antagonistic character.

The movement of money as a means of circulation synthesises the determinations of commodities that we have developed thus far. $C - M - C$: in order to satisfy their human needs by purchasing commodities which bear use-value for them, commodity-producers must have first appropriately acted as alienated personifications in the production and realisation of value. This is a pro-

duction of use-values whose condition lies in the production of value. Therefore, the objective of the circuit remains beyond it. But when we ideally follow the movement of money, we find out that the very form of this movement confronts us with the functions of money as hoard and as means of payment. Here, commodity-production has as its immediate aim the production of the objectified general social relation: both circuits end in money.

However, the production of the general social relation is, above all, the production of the capacity to open the circuit of the process of social metabolism, that is, the production of the capacity to put into motion individual labours as organs of social labour. Thus, the reproduction by means of thought of the movement of money faces us with the movement of the objectified general social relation, which opens the circuit of production of commodities with the immediate aim of producing more of itself: $M - C - M'$. Now we recognise the general social relation as capital, that is, as the capacity to put social labour into motion with the immediate aim of producing more of this same capacity. The reason for this circuit resides within the circuit itself. This is a modality of organising the process of social metabolism which has its self-multiplication as its immediate aim. Therefore, this is a social relation that acts as the immediate subject of social production, namely, an automatic organisation of social production. The consciousness and will of the individuals are concrete forms that embody the realisation of this organisation, which as such confronts them as an alien power that dominates them.

We thus discover that commodity-production, from whose simplest concrete expression we departed, is not a production of use-values mediated by the production of value. We recognise this determination now as an appearance. Commodity-production has the valorisation of capital as its immediate aim, and use-values for human life are produced only provided that surplus-value is produced. It is not about the category 'commodity' engendering the category 'capital'. On the contrary, we are now able to recognise that the simplest concrete form from which we departed, the commodity, is the product of capital.

At the stage where we recognised the commodity as the simplest concrete presented by the capitalist mode of production, it appeared that no general social relation pre-existed the private decision about the concrete form in which each producer would expend his/her individual portion of society's labour-power. The general social relation only appeared to emerge from private production, ruled by these decisions; so this alienated social relation appeared, then, as the one which determined the consciousness of the commodity-producers, in the form of the necessity to produce value. Now it becomes evident that the objectified social relation pre-existed the putting

into action of social labour in a private manner, and that the will of the capitalist, as the personification of capital, is but the concrete form under which this modality of organising social production realises its necessity.

Had we stopped before reaching this point, we would have fallen victim to an appearance which was the inverse of the true content. It would have been impossible for us to discover that the commodity from which we departed is not the simple product of labour, but the product of a labour alienated to capital. Nevertheless, we now recognise the true concrete determination, only because we departed from the commodity as that simplest concrete which confronted us in its immediateness.

As the substantive form of the general social relation, money acting as capital starts by recognising as socially necessary the labour privately materialised in two types of commodities, namely, labour-power and means of production. Then, the labour-power is transformed into living labour, which becomes materialised in a private and independent manner in a new commodity, which in turn is transformed into money, as it is recognised in circulation as a materialisation of socially necessary abstract labour.

When we faced the commodity for the first time, private ownership of one's means of production appeared to be necessary in order to produce it. Now, from a more developed concrete point of view, we see that the content is the opposite one: the worker sells his/her labour-power because, as a free individual, he/she is separated from his/her means of production. Workers are free individuals in a double sense. Freedom, which we knew to be the form of the alienation in commodities, shows through its real movement that, actually, it is the form of the alienation in capital.

It is not about the category 'capital' engendering the category 'commodity labour-power', and even less so about constructing a category 'capital' which satisfies the requirement of treating labour-power as a commodity. What we have done is to reproduce in thought the fact that the general social relation proper to the capitalist mode of production puts itself into motion by determining the worker's capacity to work as its own product.

By thus following the movement of capital, we discover that the true content enclosed by the exchange of commodities as equivalent materialisations of social labour implies that the worker is forced to render more social labour than that materialised in the means of subsistence he/she receives in exchange. That is, the exchange of equivalents is the form taken by the exploitation of the worker by capital.

Initially, when we discovered the commodity as the objectified form of the general social relation in the capitalist mode of production, it appeared that, on the one hand, the direct producer had complete control over his/her indi-

vidual labour while, on the other hand, no direct control existed over the social character of labour. We can now see that, on the one hand, the direct producer of commodities, the worker, remains a free individual although he/she does not have complete control over his/her individual labour. As this free individual, he/she must obey the authority of the capitalist who has purchased his/her labour-power. On the other hand, the capitalist directly controls the worker's labour, thus controlling a social labour, albeit in a private way. Then, just at this stage of reproducing the movement of the general social relation, we are able to recognise the commodity from which we departed as the product of a certain direct organisation – therefore conscious and voluntary – of social labour. We thus discover that private labour is not merely such, but a contradiction in itself: private labour socially organised within itself.

As an objectified social relation that immediately aims at producing more of itself, capital realises its determination by lengthening the working day. However, this, its very movement, confronts us with the negation of its own reproduction, in so far as the lengthening of the working day undermines the reproduction of labour-power. When we follow the development of this contradiction, we find that its first pole simply reproduces the antagonistic relationship between the workers as sellers of the same commodity, namely, the competition among themselves. On the contrary, the second pole causes this competition to take the concrete shape of its opposite, namely, solidarity as the normal form of selling labour-power at its value.

Thus far, it appeared that the owners of commodities were only able to relate directly with each other as personifications on an individual basis, namely, juridical relations could not go beyond private ones. But after following the movement of capital, we discover that the antagonistic relations between personifications necessarily have a public character, namely, a political character, in so far as the universe of the sellers of labour-power confronts the universe of its purchasers. In this confrontation, the former determine themselves as the working class and the latter as the capitalist class. That is, the indirect organisation of social labour through the valorisation of capital has class-struggle as its necessary concrete form. In other words, in the capitalist mode of production, the political action of social classes is the concrete form taken by capital-valorisation. In turn, the concrete forms of class-struggle confront us with the determination of the state as the political representative of the totality of the individual capitals of society.

Now, this concrete form taken by the buying and selling of labour-power confronts us with the fact that, where the independent action of individual capitals as the subjects of valorisation appeared to be the only possible unity within the process of social metabolism, these are not the actual subjects of

the said unity. In a concrete manner, total social capital is the subject of that unity. Therefore, the very alienated subject of this mode of organising the process of social metabolism is the unity of its self-reproduction.

The contradiction between a limited working day and capital's valorisation confronts us with the production of relative surplus-value. In it, the apparently independent movement of each individual capital in pursuit of an extraordinary surplus-value, achieved by developing the productivity of its workers, results in the reduction of the value of the workers' means of subsistence, and therefore the reduction of the value of labour-power and, finally, the increase of the rate of surplus-value.

Let us follow the movement of capital into the production of relative surplus-value and leap forward, for reasons of brevity, to its most powerful form: the system of machinery of large-scale industry. Now, we are able to recognise that the commodity from which we departed was the concrete realised form of very different determinations from those we were able to discover in it as the simplest specific concrete. As that simplest concrete, we knew it as the product of a free individual, who as such exerted complete control over his/her individual labour but lacked any control over its social character, so he/she had to alienate his/her consciousness to the social powers of the product of his/her labour, or, in other words, he/she had to produce value. The development of capital as the subject of the production of relative surplus-value shows us now, firstly, that the commodity from which we departed concretely is the product of the labour of a collective of doubly-free individuals. Secondly, this collective worker consciously governs the labour of its individual organs by means of a production-plan elaborated by an objective, namely scientific, consciousness. Therefore, the collective worker acts with complete control over the unity of its labour as a private organ of social production. However, it lacks any control over the general social character of its labour. Consequently, it has to alienate its consciousness in the service of the social powers of the product of its labour, that is, it has to produce surplus-value.⁴⁰

Thus far, we have followed capital along the complete movement of its circuit of valorisation, that is to say, along the process within which surplus-value emerges from capital. The only movement that capital presents us, beyond this circuit, is the reproduction of this same circuit. As we follow this reproduction, we are confronted by three contents that appeared inverted in the buying and selling of labour-power in circulation, beyond the exchange of equivalents as the necessary form of exploitation. Firstly, under the form of the worker's freedom, he/she is a forced labourer for total social capital. Secondly, under the

40 Íñigo Carrera 2008 [2003], pp. 15–23.

form of the worker's personal interest in reproducing him/herself, the need of capital to reproduce labour-power is achieved. Thirdly, under the form of private property based on one's own labour, private property based on the gratuitous appropriation of the product of others' labour asserts itself.

Certainly the latter determination was present in the commodity from which we departed. Why did we not depart directly by making evident this actual content? Because it would have implied we were attempting to discover the necessity borne in the commodity produced by capital by turning the point of departure into an abstraction. Given its own aim, the dialectics that reproduces the concrete in thought can only start from the immediacy with which the unity between the subject and the object (the subject's own alienated social relation) actually confronts the former under its simplest concrete form.⁴¹

As we follow the reproduction of capital, we find out that the expansion of the private capacity directly to organise social labour develops beyond the concentration of each individual capital, through the centralisation of capitals. And in this double movement, we confront the most developed concrete form of the contradiction that emerges from the fact that the immediate object of social production is the extensive and intensive multiplication of the capacity to put social labour in motion. This attribute determines the capitalist mode of production as a revolutionary one, with respect to the development of the productive forces of social labour. Nevertheless, the same attribute determines it as a barrier to this development. Its extreme expression in this sense is the transformation of an increasing part of the working class into a surplus-population for capital, that is, for its own general social relation.

The reproduction by way of thought of the movement of the materialised social relation brings us now to the specific historical determination of the capitalist mode of production. This is the development of the productive forces of labour by means of the ever increasing socialisation of private labour. The socialisation of labour implies that consciousness is able to govern the organisation of the process of social metabolism by objectively knowing the potentiality of human productive activity with respect to the potentialities presented by its environment. Private labour implies that consciousness is unable to know in an objective manner the same potentialities and their unity, as they confront it as powers materialised in the products of labour to which it is submitted. The capitalist mode of production is itself a contradiction in constant development towards its own supersession through the complete socialisation of labour.

41 Marx 1965 [1867], pp. 583–6.

4 Dialectics as Reproduction of the Concrete by Way of Thought and Its Subject

To supersede the constructive necessity that rules the path of thought means to leave thought without any necessity to follow other than that with which the movement of its object faces it. The point is to develop 'a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought'.⁴²

Given its very form, this reproduction cannot take an autonomous shape, constructed by the proper movement itself of the categories of thought abstracted from their object. Then, the question here is as follows: upon which concrete could the method of the reproduction of the concrete by way of thought be developed for the first time in history?

Knowledge is the form in which the subject organises its action of actually appropriating its environment, by virtually appropriating the potentiality of its action with respect to the potentialities that its environment offers it. More specifically, consciousness is the form in which the individual human subject rules his/her action as an organ of the process of social metabolism based upon labour. Consciousness is thus the form in which the human subject carries in his/her person his/her social relation.

Therefore, firstly, the object of human knowledge is always the knowledge of one's own subjectivity. Secondly, the form of consciousness, namely, the method by which the human subject produces his/her knowledge, is in itself a form of his/her own social relation. As it is a social relation, far from being a natural form, the method of knowledge is a historically determined form. In this historical determination, Marx opposes his method to Hegel's:

In its mystified form, dialectic . . . seemed to transfigure and to glorify the existing state of things. In its rational form it . . . is in its essence critical and revolutionary.⁴³

A consciousness whose method divorces the movement of thought from the actual movement is neither an aberration nor an expression of 'inadequacy' or 'immaturity', as Hegel believed concerning formal logical representation.⁴⁴ It is a consciousness whose social being inhibits it from fully appropriating its own real powers. Thus, these very powers confront it as powers it is unable to control. It is an alienated consciousness. Instead of being able to advance by repro-

⁴² Marx 1973 [1857–8], p. 101.

⁴³ Marx 1965 [1867], p. 20.

⁴⁴ Hegel 1999 [1812–16], pp. 38, 685.

ducing the real necessity embodied in its object, it needs to replace this necessity with an ideal constructive necessity, with a logic that puts into motion a system of categories, in order to appear as the most pure expression of an abstractly free subjectivity.

Therefore, the need to develop a dialectic the inverse of Hegel's – a dialectic that replaces constructive necessity with the reproduction of real necessity in thought – finds its basis in a form of a specific historical development of the productive forces of social labour. It arises from the need of the process of social metabolism to invert the mode by which it rules itself. That is, this dialectic has its point of departure within a mode of production in which the subject lacks complete control over the social powers of his/her own labour. Thus, these powers confront him/her as an objectified attribute of the material product of that labour and, therefore, as alien to his/her own subjectivity. Therefore, even the objective consciousness (namely, scientific consciousness) of the said subject needs to stop at that appearance. And this need takes concrete shape in a method of cognition that substitutes the necessity inherent in its object with an ideal constructive necessity alien to that objectivity. The radical inversion of this mode of regulating the process of social metabolism implies that the subject's consciousness reaches the complete domination of his/her condition as an individual organ of social labour and, therefore, that the subject's consciousness recognises the power of social labour as his/her own power. However, this new form of consciousness can only be engendered by the development of the pre-existent one. Therefore, its birth appears as the inversion of the most powerful form of the pre-existent method. Thus, the production of the new consciousness takes concrete shape in the method of cognition that, given that it has the necessity itself of its object as the only necessity to follow, forces its subject to face his/her own alienation. And this is the first step given by that subject in the historically specific development of his/her freedom.

The production of this consciousness is, therefore, the concrete through which the method of the 'reproduction of the concrete by way of thought' necessarily could be developed for the first time in history.

Hegel's *Science of Logic* is the social objectification (a text) of the process in which a consciousness, historically determined by its social being, produces itself on the basis of stopping at the appearance of being an abstract self-consciousness, which in its own movement engenders the real. It is the most developed expression of an alienated consciousness which, in order to reproduce itself in its alienation, needs to take the inversion inherent in any logical representation to its final consequences.

To presuppose the requirement of a logical necessity to apprehend any real concrete in thought is, by itself, to presuppose that the real concrete lacks all proper necessity to be mentally followed. If real necessity existed, what sense would there be to resort to a mental constructive necessity instead of simply following the development of the real one with our thought? Therefore, the real forms must appear as being unable to relate, to move by themselves, at the beginning of the process of representation. Nevertheless, when they emerge from this process, they do so full of the relations that logic has established between them.

However, Hegel does not consider concrete forms to be unable to move by themselves. Instead, he discovers the form of the real movement, namely, self-affirmation through self-negation.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, at the same time, he reproduces the appearance proper of the representation by inverting the said movement, as if it emerged from the movement of a consciousness that has itself as its sole determination, of a self-consciousness:

Accordingly, what is to be considered here as method is only the movement of the *Notion* itself, the nature of which movement has already been cognized; but *first*, there is now the added *significance* that the *Notion is everything*, and its movement is the *universal absolute activity*, the self-determining and self-realizing movement . . . The method . . . is therefore not only the highest *force*, or rather the *sole* and absolute *force* of reason, but also its supreme and sole *urge* to find and cognize *itself by means of itself in everything*.⁴⁶

However, by discovering that self-affirmation through self-negation is the simplest and more general form of determination, Hegel takes philosophy to the end of its historical possibility to bear the advance of the objective consciousness in the organisation of social metabolism. He does so, as the very form of his method makes evident the need for the missing final step, in which real necessity is put in the place thus far occupied by ideal necessity. After Hegel, philosophy can only withdraw towards the rational cultivation of the purest formal exteriority (logical positivism) or towards the cultivation of the crudest irrationality (Nietzsche, postmodernism).

Capital is not a concept whose movement obeys the necessity imposed upon it by thought. The relation is completely the opposite. Capital is a general social relation, that is, a mode of organising social labour and, therefore, social

45 Marx 1975e [1844], p. 332.

46 Hegel 1999 [1812–16], p. 826.

consumption. In this mode of production, the organisation of social labour within each unit of production is an attribute that privately pertains to it. Conversely, each productive unit lacks control over the general social character of the labour it performs. Social labour is organised in a private and independent way. The unity between social production and consumption is thus established in an indirect manner. The capacity to privately organise social labour operates as an attribute materialised in the product of the same labour. At the same time, the immediate aim that rules the putting into action of social labour is not the production of social use-values, but the expanded reproduction of the same objectified capacity to put into action social labour in a private manner. The objectified social relation is the one that puts into action social labour in order to produce more of itself. Such is capital's essential determination.

Again, consciousness is, above all, the capacity of human subjects to rule their own individual labour as organs of social labour. However, in the capitalist mode of production, this power confronts its subjects as a power that belongs to the material product of their social labour. That is, the determination proper of the subjects' consciousness confronts their consciousness itself as a power located beyond it, as an autonomised capacity to put into action social labour which their consciousness itself must obey, that is, of which consciousness must act as a concrete form of realisation. As such, the said autonomised capacity puts consciousness into movement. In reality, the movement of capital puts thought into movement, determining it as an alienated thought.

As a historical form of the development of the productive forces of social labour, capital determines a specific movement of consciousness. The specifically capitalist form of developing the productive forces of social labour consists in the progressive socialisation of private labour. That is, it consists in the development of the capacity to organise social labour through the objective knowledge of one's own determinations, as a concrete form of the realisation of the development of the organisation of social labour as the negation of such objective knowledge. The development of the productive forces of immediately social free labour as an attribute of its very negation, namely, of private labour, is the contradiction that synthesises the historical potentialities and the absolute limit of the capitalist mode of production. And the transformation of the materiality of the labour in which the development of the said contradiction takes concrete form (the production of relative surplus-value) determines the working class to be the subject whose action realises such development.

The capitalist social relation itself needs to engender this social subject, which produces its consciousness under the form in which every constructive

necessity – that as such seems to make thought move by itself independently of the actual movement of its object – must disappear. At the same time, the place of this constructive necessity can only be taken by the reproduction in thought of the movement of the very necessity of the real concrete. Therefore, it is about a subject whose general social relation provides it with no starting point other than being in possession of an alienated consciousness and, consequently, a consciousness which is a prisoner of the idealistic inversions of logical representation. But it is about a subject determined by its general social relation as the bearer of the necessity to develop its consciousness up to the point of freeing it from any inverted construction. It is, therefore, about an alienated subject whose social being makes it the active subject of the revolutionary transformation of the mode of organising the process of social production, which it accomplishes by abolishing all alienation. The reproduction of the concrete by means of thought, through which every subject rules his/her individual labour as he/she completely knows him/herself as an organ of social labour, thus asserts itself as the concrete form of the general social relation.

Marx's *Capital* is the social objectification (a text) of the process in which, for the first time in history, the movement of the general social relation of the working class as an alienated subject confronts this subject with the necessity to rule its conscious action by giving an account of its own alienation, which it can do because it has the real development of the latter as the only source of its own flow. This alienated subject, which advances in its freedom by becoming aware of its alienation, thus becomes aware of the historical power that this same alienated social relation provides it as the necessary subject of its supersession. And knowing such powers means nothing other than organising such radical superseding action. In other words, *Capital* is in itself the development, performed for the first time and in a form that allows its social reproduction, of the alienated consciousness of the working class that produces itself as an alienated consciousness that is aware of its own alienation and of the historical powers it derives therefrom.